

It is worth noting, for its bearing on later events, that this letter, like the record of Lansing's recent talk with Ishii, made no mention of any participation by the British or the French in such an undertaking.

After sending the letter on to the President, Lansing replied to Kennan that he had read it with special interest "because it comes from the highest authority in America on Russia." He was not sure, he said, of the wisdom of intervention in Siberia, but he was gratified to find "that your reaction to the confusion of the situation is very similar to my own ..." He could assure Kennan

... that the subject is receiving very careful consideration both as to the policy and as to the physical difficulties of transportation, which on account of lack of ships in the Pacific are very great. 38/

In the particular matter of a possible economic commission, pressure on the Administration was now beginning to go beyond mere expressions of opinion and to assume organizational forms. We have already noted that the end of May was precisely the time when the "League to Aid and Cooperate with Russia" was threatening most seriously to become active and to generate ideas and proposals of its own -- a prospect always alarming to the men around Wilson. In addition to this the War Trade Board, under the able management of Mr. Vance McCormick, appointed on May 21 a three-man committee (one of the members was Mr. John Foster Dulles) to chart out a program for the resumption of economic dealings with

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39/ George Kennan MSS, Library of Congress, Box 8.

Council appealed to President Wilson "to approve the policy here recommended and thus to enable it to be carried into effect before it is too late."<sup>28/</sup>

This final appeal from the Supreme War Council reached Washington, and was handed by Reading to the President, on the afternoon of July 3, shortly before Lansing's phone call about the Czech seizure of Vladivostok. The time of decision had now finally arrived. The choice -- to the President, at least -- now seemed reasonably clear.

The next day was the Fourth of July, and one of the hottest. There was an excursion to Mount Vernon on the Presidential yacht, THE MAYFLOWER. Both the President and Lansing were aboard. The other guests included a number of representatives of various foreign language groups in the United States. It was understood that the President would make a speech at Mount Vernon; and it was thought by many that he might use this as an occasion for announcing his decision with respect to Russia.

Wilson was courteous enough to his guests, and tried to make them feel at home in the face of the sweltering heat. But we may assume that both he and Lansing had their minds rather on Siberian matters than on the steaming banks of the Potomac past which they moved. At some time during the course of that day, whether before or after the excursion, Lansing found the leisure to draw up a memorandum for the President on the Siberian question. It was to be a decisive recommendation. The seizure of Vladivostok by the Czechs, and their success in western Siberia, had "materially changed the situation," <sup>Lansing</sup> he wrote, "by introducing a sentimental element into the question of our duty." There was now an

<sup>28/</sup> Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia, Vol. II, op. cit., p. 246; from Frazier's telegram to SECRETARY, July 2, midnight (pp. 241-246).

KENNAN

American responsibility to aid them. He proposed that a supply of arms be sent to the Czech contingent in Vladivostok, and that "some" troops should be sent to assist them in policing the railroad and in "disarming and dispersing" the German and Austrian prisoners-of-war who, he understood, were opposing them. Aiding the Czechs was, after all, an entirely different thing from intervening on other grounds. Even though some American forces were sent, one would have to rely on Japan to supply the bulk of the requisite forces. The announcement of the intention, and the readiness to refrain from interfering in Russian internal affairs, should be made at once. A peaceful commission of representatives of various phases of society, "to-wit, moral, industrial, commercial, financial and agricultural," should be sent and should "proceed westward from Vladivostok following as closely as possible, with due regard to safety, the Czecho-Slovaks." Its final destination and function should depend on its reception by the Russian people and on the military resistance encountered.<sup>29/</sup>

Lansing's memorandum was presumably sent to the President on the morning of Friday, the 5th. Later that day the President phoned and said he wished to see Lansing, Baker, Secretary of Navy Josephus Daniels, and General March at two o'clock on the 6th. The meeting took place that Saturday afternoon, as scheduled, in an upper room of the White House, with Admiral Benson also attending. "After we had ... seated ourselves, somewhat in order of rank," General March later recorded, "the President entered the room with a pad in his hand, and taking a position standing and facing us, ... read from his pad his views

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<sup>29/</sup> Lansing MSS, op.cit., Diary Blue Boxes, Box 2.

KENNAN

IX/3

that afternoon it dawned on Lansing that the Japanese would immediately tell the other Allied governments about the American approach and that great resentment would ensue if, in the meantime, they had heard nothing directly from Washington. He at once exposed these reflections in a note to the President<sup>1/</sup> and obtained the latter's approval to his apprising the British, French, and Italian envoys, in strictest confidence, of what had been decided. This was done the following morning (Tuesday, July 9), in three separate interviews at the Department of State.<sup>2/</sup> No record of these interviews is available. There is reason to believe that the reaction of Lord Reading, in particular, was one of outraged astonishment, partly over the manner in which the decision had been taken, partly because of Lansing's studied ambiguity about the part the western Allies were to take in the proposed action.

In early afternoon there was a Cabinet meeting. Remaining after the others had left, Lansing told the President of Reading's reaction. Both men, evidently, were irritated by it. (Wartime strain and weariness was, by this time, breeding its characteristic asperities. Wilson and his Secretary of State had both now worked themselves into a high state of suspicion of British motives and resentment of British pressures in the Siberian problem.) Not long after Lansing had returned to his desk at the State Department the three Allied envoys (the other two plainly marshalled by Reading for this purpose) appeared in a body, demanding to know

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1/ Foreign Relations. The Lansing Papers, Vol. II, op.cit., pp. 372-373.

2/ Lansing MSS, op.cit., Desk Diary.

whether the Allied Governments were not to take part in the initial landing of troops at Vladivostok or whether it was our [i.e. the American] purpose to confine the enterprise to Japanese and American troops.

Lansing replied that he had never discussed the matter with the President and could see no object in doing so until Japanese approval had been obtained, at which time the United States government would be glad to consult with the western Allies. Sharp exchanges ensued. Lansing charged that in failing to consult the Allies the Americans were only doing what had been done to themselves on many occasions. Peeding found this statement offensive; and he insisted that the Allies ought to participate in the initial landing. To this Lansing replied

... that this seemed to me rather a matter of national pride and sentiment than a practical question; that I could not understand why this subject should be raised and that it showed to me the wisdom of the course which we had taken in not consulting all the Allied Governments before we had acted as apparently there would have been delay in discussing the details ... 3/

It is impossible to note this passage without drawing attention to the extraordinary workings of the American mind in matters of inter-Allied relations. For six months the Allied governments had pleaded with the United States government to join them in some action relating to Siberia and had refrained, most reluctantly, from action of their own while they waited for the United States to make up its mind. Now Washington, having made its own decision without consulting them, was determined to act with utmost precipitation. Two days was even too short a time; and the need for haste was cited as justification for not

3/ Foreign Relations, 1918, Russia, Vol. II, op.cit., pp. 269-270.

KENNAN

XIX/5

consulting the Allies at all. But beyond that, one cannot fail to note Lansing's contemptuous rejection of the British view as a "sentimental" one. Five days before, in drawing up his own memorandum for the President on the Siberian question, Lansing had justified the entire change of American policy by the proposition that the seizure of Vladivostok by the Czechs "had materially changed the situation by introducing a sentimental element into the question of our duty."<sup>4</sup> The July 6 decision had cited "sentimental grounds" as dictating the American action. Now Lansing complained precisely that Reading's attitude was a matter of sentiment. More than once, in this acrimonious conversation, he returned to this charge. "I was not disposed," he said,

to consider the sentimental phase but only the expedient side of the question. ... I thought expediency should control and that if expedience was opposed to British participation that, to my mind, ended it, ...

Sentiment, when it came to determining American actions; expedience, when it came to judging the behavior of America's Allies -- this is the principle that appears to flow from Lansing's reactions on this occasion.

Lord Reading was, for obvious reasons, unappeased by Lansing's position. With difficulty he was restrained, the following day, from telegraphing to his government a stinging report on the matter which, the President considered, would have made a good deal of trouble.<sup>5</sup> Even without this report, the irritation in London was intense. Without delay, on the 10th, the British government

<sup>4</sup>/ See above, p. XVIII/20-21 (italics are mine).

<sup>5</sup>/ Lansing MSS, op.cit., Desk Diary, July 10.



KEWEN

This contains the policy of the United States in Russia which you are to follow. Watch your step; you will be walking on eggs loaded with dynamite. God bless you and good-bye.

This order was substantially the only political guidance General Graves was ever to receive in the promulgation of his intensely delicate and complicated mission. That it was, even at the time it was presented to him, utterly inadequate to its purpose, that it was still further out of date by the time he arrived in Siberia, and that within two months after his arrival it had lost all conceivable relevance, seems never to have occurred to him. He accepted it with that unquestioning and religious reverence which sterling soldiers normally bear for directives from supreme authority. For one and a half years he would cling to the letter of it with a stubbornness that would drive his Allied colleagues and associates to despair; and he would never cease to regard with baleful suspicion and hostility anyone who professed to have other orders or anyone who had the temerity to question the relevance and wisdom of his own.<sup>11/</sup>

On the same day that General Graves received these orders, August 3, the President issued to the press a communiqué which represented, in effect, a paraphrase of the key portions of the aide-mémoire. On this same day, Japanese and British forces arrived in Vladivostok and began to go ashore. Also on this day, August 3, in addition to giving General Graves his orders, the War Department directed the Commanding General in the Philippines to despatch to

<sup>11/</sup> In a telegram to Polk of July 31, Lansing, then on vacation, warned against Graves' appointment as commander of the Siberian expedition. He had heard, he said, that Graves "has not the tact and diplomacy ... to deal with so delicate a situation where the Commanding Officer requires other than military ability." (Polk MSS, op.cit.) Plainly, no heed was paid to this warning.